

CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S.-PHILIPPINES ALLIANCE

BY

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In the early 1990's, after failing to renegotiate the 1947 Military Bases Agreement, the United States ended 45 years of forward defense basing in the Republic of the Philippines. Subic Naval Base, Clark Airfield, and several smaller installations were turned over to the Government of the Philippines (GRP). Additionally the U.S. Military discontinued approximately \$200M in annual Foreign Military Finance, access to spare parts and management assistance. For nearly a decade, the once close relationship stagnated. During this time, The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) alarmingly declined in readiness, and since relinquishing the bases, the U.S. has shown varying interest in the security relationship. Short of recognizing an existential mutual threat, it is unlikely the U.S. and Philippines will ever reach the level of cooperation they once enjoyed. This research paper focuses on the past decade, seeking to predict the future relevance of the U.S.-Philippines alliance. This study specifically looks at three significant 21st Century aspects to the relationship that have dominated the past decade

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CURRENT STATE OF THE U.S.-PHILIPPINES ALLIANCE

...Desiring to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity and their common determination to defend themselves against external armed attack...

—Preamble of the RP-US Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951.¹

With the destruction of the Spanish Fleet in Manila Bay on May 1, 1898, the United States and the Republic of the Philippines were thrust together like step siblings in a new marriage. There was never a question whether the Philippines would rule themselves, but when and under what conditions.² Gaining control of the Islands was an unintended consequence of a war with Spain. Often, based on misunderstanding of the other's intent and role, the two treaty partners have become frustrated and at times distant from each other.

From the beginning, the U.S. intended to prepare the Philippines for eventual independence, never accepting colonial master responsibilities to a country 8500 miles from the Washington, D.C. The Filipinos saw the U.S. as merely a more benevolent replacement to the Spanish and, while they vigorously sought independence, still desired the safety net of financial aid while exploring what that independence meant. This issue could have been solved decades ago, but as is often the case, the beneficiary became addicted to the fruits of the benefactor, wishing to break free, but finding it nearly impossible to do so. The U.S., often frustrated at the pace with which the Filipinos moved toward true security self-reliance, nevertheless felt compelled to continue support thereby perpetuating the problem. The outcome is an alliance that falls short of either party's expectations.

The U.S. is sympathetic to Filipino challenges and is forever ready to assist but often becomes frustrated at the lack of quid pro quo. The Philippines fastidiously guards sovereignty on one hand, but expects and relies on unrestricted aid. Perhaps culture is the culprit and, even though the U.S. and the Philippines have endured a mutual history, there remains a fundamental departure in perceptions of the relationship.

Filipino-Americans represent a prevalent ethnic force in many U.S. Congressional constituencies.³ The United States maintains its largest overseas Social Security Administration office in Manila due to the some 76,000 beneficiaries who have settled in the Philippines.⁴ This unique aspect is therefore an additional political consideration for our foreign policy with the Philippines.

Major U.S. policy objectives in the Philippines include: bolstering the Philippines as a strong U.S. ally in Southeast Asia; assisting the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in counterterrorism efforts; supporting the peace process in Mindanao; helping the AFP to modernize its equipment and adhere to democratic principles; and provide assistance for political and economic development.⁵ This paper will look at the three most significant aspects of the 21st Century U.S.-Philippines security relationship, Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines, the Philippines Defense Reform Program and the Visiting Forces Agreement.

In order to adequately secure the Philippines in accordance with treaty obligations, the U.S. expects access to ports, bases and facilities will be granted in a scenario involving potential existential threats. In contrast, many in the Philippines

government resist this notion because they suspect a U.S. motivation to reestablish permanent bases on Philippine soil.

U.S. withdrawal from the Philippines in the early 1990's took an estimated \$200M in annual Foreign Military Finance (FMF) from the AFP. Also gone was open access to the U.S. military logistical system and defense management assistance. During the so-called *bases era*, lasting from Philippines independence in 1947 to eventual U.S. departure in the early '90s, the Philippine defense establishment existed essentially as a surrogate, relying heavily on the U.S. logistics system for survival. Soon after the U.S. withdrawal, the Philippine government quickly began selling some of the larger facilities to commercial interests.⁶ This plan has shown varying degrees of commercial success, but Filipinos failed to adequately reinvest the profits into their security forces. The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) took control of the remaining government-owned facilities, but absent the accompanying U.S. logistical system, the once vibrant bases quickly fell into disrepair. U.S. FMF and International Military Education Training (IMET) for the Philippines is the largest in Asia. These programs cannot, however, fill the vacuum left at the end of the bases era.⁷

Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army

Contributing to the AFP's readiness challenge is a near continuous 40-year struggle against the determined New People's Army (NPA), the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CCP). The CCP's stated goal is to overthrow the democratically elected Philippine government which they claim is corrupt and disinterested in the lives of average Filipinos.⁸ The U.S. lists the NPA as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), but does not directly support operations against this movement, couching it as an internal Philippines threat.⁹ Important to note is the priority

the Philippines puts on defeating the NPA whom they consider an existential threat. It is therefore not surprising that they place the priority of their limited military funding against this effort.

The Abu Sayyaf Group

In the late '90's the U.S. government became concerned when kidnappings involving Americans working or visiting the Southern Philippines began to occur at an alarming rate. In one famous case, Martin and Gracia Burnham, American missionaries from the Florida-based New Tribes Mission, were taken hostage by relatively unknown radical Islamic terrorists known as the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG). The ASG was originally formed on Muslim fundamentalist motivations and claimed ties to Al Qaeda.¹⁰ After a year in captivity, and kept constantly on the run by their captors, U.S.-trained Filipino commandos overran the ASG and rescued Gracia Burnham. Tragically, Martin Burnham was accidentally shot and killed in the rescue attempt.¹¹ The ASG's alleged al-Qaeda ties gained U.S. attention amid fears of potential regional and transnational reach. ASG ties to al-Qaeda were loose and they allegedly received limited financial support but this relationship was proven to be largely benign. Of greater concern were training camps established in under-governed areas of Mindanao in the Southern Philippines where members of Jemaah Islamiya (JI), an Indonesia-based terrorist organization, were provided safe-haven and allowed to train transnational actors.¹² Affiliation with JI allowed the ASG to graduate from being characterized as "bikers with boats," who posed an internal threat, to that of regional terror advocate warranting U.S. involvement.¹³ It was generally held that the ASG was sufficiently trained and equipped to pose a regional threat if left unchecked and therefore the U.S. and the Philippines joined together in a determined effort to defeat them. To encourage and enable the

Filipinos to open another focused front in the Southern Philippines, the U.S. had to both assist with the initial equipment and training, and place military forces on the ground.

Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines

In the anti-terrorism furor of the early 21st Century, the U.S. found renewed interest in the Philippines and the two allies rejoined in a combined effort against an emerging threat. To quickly address the terrorist threat the U.S. allocated funds to improve the Philippines' counterterrorism capability. Drawing on a Congressional earmark, U.S. Embassy-Manila and USPACOM assisted the AFP to form, equip and train Army Light Reaction Companies, stand up a Naval Special Warfare unit, initiate intelligence modernization, and upgrade aviation assets.¹⁴ Respecting the Philippine Constitutional restriction against foreign forces engaging in direct combat, the U.S. offered instead to deploy a small number of forces that would act in a strict advise and assist role enabling the AFP to more effectively engage the terrorists.¹⁵ This ambitious proposal has shown surprising success with combined U.S. and AFP conduct of Operation Enduring Freedom-Philippines.

At the request of the Philippine Government, The Joint Special Operations Task Force – Philippines (JSOTF-P) commenced operations in October 2002 to provide temporary support to the AFP in the fight against ASG and JI. The JSOTF-P is subordinate to United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) through the Special Operations Command-Pacific (SOCPAC). The JSOTF-P maintains a liaison element in Manila with the majority of forces collocated on Camp Navarro, Zamboanga, Mindanao Province, Southern Philippines.¹⁶

Since establishment, the JSOTF-P has grown in scope and size currently numbering approximately 600 personnel who rotate every six months, and are resourced from various units. They carry weapons for self-defense only and the majority of their effort involves assistance with operational planning at battalion level and above, intelligence fusion, humanitarian support, and strategic communications. Filipino anti-American groups often falsely accuse JSOTF-P troops of participating in combat operations, claiming their presence violates Philippines' sovereignty and demonstrates intent to renew permanent basing in the Philippines.¹⁷ To counter these claims and highlight the non-lethal nature of their mission, JSOTF-P frequently partners with the AFP, USAID, and various NGOs to conduct Civil-Military Operations and humanitarian assistance projects. In addition to promoting positive relations with the local population, JSOTF-P's policy of supporting an AFP lead on each of these projects has greatly renewed popular confidence in Filipino security forces.

Working together, the AFP and JSOTF-P have successfully halted terrorist momentum in the Southern Philippines. Currently, the ASG is unable to pose a transnational threat having been reduced to little more than a criminal nuisance. Top ASG leaders have either been killed or driven so deep into the jungle they are rendered irrelevant. This success is attributable to AFP diligence combined with access to state-of-the-art equipment and assets provided through OEF-P. Admittedly, the ASG continues to maintain a relationship with small numbers of dangerous JI operatives, occasionally providing safe-haven and other low-level assistance, but even these efforts have been seriously curtailed. In the absence of sufficient pressure, it is likely that these groups will resurge making some level of enduring U.S. assistance necessary. It

is however, time to relook the scope of assistance to prevent mission-creep that fails to provide added value or worse, drags the U.S. unwittingly into various internal Filipino struggles.

Through OEF-P, the AFP has improved to a capability level allowing them to plan and execute counter-terrorism operations without a persistent US force presence and with a steady infusion of targeted assistance, they will be able to contain and eventually defeat the threat. The skills AFP units engaged in the south with the ASG have achieved will allow them to train other Filipino security forces, however, the AFP's technical and intelligence capability is inadequate and it is unlikely they will be able to overcome this capability challenge in the foreseeable future. Intel-sharing and Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) technical asset access remain the most useful tools provided through OEF-P and represent a reasonable enduring level of U.S. assistance.

In light of expected reductions in the U.S. defense budget, further commitment to deployments like OEF-P will likely come under intense scrutiny. In the grand scheme of U.S. global counter-terror efforts, JSOTF-P has provided a successful return from a relatively small investment. The majority of the JSOTF-P contribution can be reduced with continued engagement through USPACOM's Theater Security Cooperation Plan activities. With proper oversight, this solution would adequately meet the requirement in the long term.

This section intentionally avoids discussing the AFP's counter-insurgency operations against the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). While these groups pose a serious internal threat, the U.S. has

resisted becoming directly involved in these conflicts short of assisting with peace negotiations between insurgents and the Philippines Government.¹⁸

Philippines Defense Reform: A Valiant Attempt to Jump-Start Professionalism

The Philippines Defense Reform Program (PDR) is a combined US-Philippines effort within both the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Department of National Defense (DND). The program seeks to reform, modernize, and standardize a system hobbled by traditional bureaucracy and waste. The official program was conceived as early as 2002 but was not initiated until 2005. The PDR has been a relative success and will officially conclude this year when targeted U.S. assistance terminates, however, the effects of initiated changes will continue under the guidance of a strengthened Philippines Department of National Defense (DND).¹⁹

Throughout the visionary, planning and execution program phases, many in both the U.S. and Filipino governments were skeptical of the PDR's potential success. A firmly entrenched system founded on cronyism and corruption was inherently resistant to reform. To address this, the PDR was founded on three basic tenets;

*Professionalism, Competence and Capability.*²⁰ These general objectives speak volumes to what was wrong with the Philippine Defense establishment prior to initiation of the PDR. The good news is that while the system was broken, the people were not. Solid leadership and vision combined with a keen desire for change within the rank and file provided the necessary fuel to overcome obstacles and embark on revolutionary reform.

As noted earlier, the end of the bases era marked a period of serious atrophy for the AFP. Lack of U.S. assistance, along with a poor economy, encouraged a system in

which individuals that were fortunate enough to get a government job stayed on as long as they possibly could. Filipino culture frowns on employee termination and this resulted in top-heavy, overly bureaucratic government institutions. The DND and AFP were prime examples of this dilemma. With the average military age at roughly 48 years, there was little room for new recruits. General acceptance of one's position in the organization was standard with little incentive to exceed minimum requirements. Congressionally restricted budgets made this a zero-sum personnel game where new recruits could only be brought on when individuals retired or were killed in action. Stagnation was common in all areas of a broken military culture where membership for all but the most elite units and Academy graduates was looked upon as a job versus a profession. The extremely top-heavy Officer Corps operated within a strict Philippine Military Academy (PMA) classmate network that benefited its members but excluded almost everyone else.²¹ Additionally the once vibrant Reserve Officer Training Program, offering an alternative to the PMA, had fallen by the way-side due to limited funding and realization that PMA graduation was the narrow path to military success.²² Officers remained largely disaffected from the non-commissioned officer and enlisted ranks who were essentially treated as second-class citizens. The culture also discriminated against those who served in perceived non-glamorous military occupation specialties. Those outside of the combat arms were discounted for promotions and schooling opportunities which ensured that no one with talent or ambition would enter these fields. Individual service staffs tolerated, but resisted coordinating with the joint higher headquarters of the AFP or the DND who provided no funding and were therefore considered irrelevant. There was no effective staff process or inter-service coordination

with each service focused internally and remained isolated from the others. There was little accountability and subsequently no consequence for failure.²³

At the beginning of the reform initiative, the AFP had been in near constant conflict for 40 years with a New People's Army. Additionally, Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines periodically rose up seeking autonomy from the central government. After years of fighting, these insurgent groups were battle hardened and well-equipped causing, with few exceptions, military units continuously to remain in the fight, unable to refit or train. Training standards varied from one unit to the next and doctrine was outdated, ignored or non-existent. The general consensus within the leadership was that units didn't need to train since they were constantly in combat thereby compounding the problem. Battalions experiencing the heaviest combat were normally unable to deploy more than 1/5th of unit strength due to casualties, leaves of absence or under-resourcing. Funding was sporadic and largely meted out based on recent activity or in accordance with political connections. U.S. advisors were stunned to learn that the base Philippines Army unit, the Infantry Battalion, on the average had conducted no sustainment training in 8-10 years.²⁴

With assistance from the Joint US Military Assistance Group-Philippines (JUSMAG-P), the Philippines DND initiated policy-level discussions determined to find the best way to reform Philippine defense capability. The goal they sought was a self-sustaining system that would allow the Philippines to meet internal security challenges while emerging as a viable regional security partner. This resulted in the 2001 Joint Initial Assessment (JIA) of the Philippine Defense systems and Organization spurred by former President Arroyo's May 2003 state visit to Washington when she officially asked

for U.S. assistance to develop a defense reform initiative.²⁵ This led to a follow-up Joint Defense Assessment (JDA) and formulation of recommendations to target various deficiencies.²⁶ The JDA found the AFP barely able to conduct its most basic missions. Alarming to senior leaders was the revelation that the Philippine defense system was broken and in need of serious institutional reform. The assessment further concluded there was lack of a comprehensive, DND strategy to build sustainable, threat-based capabilities.²⁷

During President George W. Bush's October 2003 visit to the Philippines, he and President Arroyo committed to a multi-year reform plan, which became the Philippine Defense Reform (PDR) program.²⁸ Initial efforts to implement the PDR program were met with a great deal of both active and passive resistance. Those with the power to affect change had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo and those who otherwise favored change saw it as a futile effort without leadership support. From the end of the Marcos dictatorship in 1986, the Philippine military generally saw its role as protector of the people, including a perceived responsibility to remove corrupt or inept governments when necessary. This attitude resulted in a coup culture where the civilian government was forced to rely on the military to keep it in power. In order to achieve reform, the Philippine government was required to maintain a balance between forcing change and maintaining critical political support.

Initial actions were meant to establish a sense of urgency within the DND and the AFP. Armed with a conviction of purpose, the DND set upon a well-thought out plan for organizational change. Intended or not, actions taken to implement and carry out the reform program were successful and can be analyzed within the context of John

Kotter's eight-step organizational change model.²⁹ The PDR program, as could be expected, started off slowly, with little buy-in from the uniformed leadership. DND leadership knew that building consensus would require a carrot and stick approach that got the bureaucracy moving and rewarded participation. At the same time, the U.S. government was reluctant to provide monetary assistance without a Philippine Government funding commitment. In response to U.S. pressure, President Arroyo committed \$1M USD to the effort. Although a relatively small sum in U.S. terms, this made a significant statement to skeptics on both sides, and this funding was enough to purchase needed equipment for units in combat thereby gaining the support of commanders. The leadership was equally adept at placing the PDR label on every new program and procurement. The message was clear. Get on board with the PDR quick or be left behind.

DND leadership knew that funding and equipment would get attention in the short term but long term success would require forming a core group of believers within the uniformed leadership.³⁰ Now that attention was gained through anticipation of more funding and equipment, they needed a stick that would put down dissent and prod non-supporters out of passive resistance. The leadership initiated weekly milestone meetings requiring all the assistant and undersecretaries to attend. The Armed Forces Chief of Staff, arguably the strongest figure in Filipino politics representing military support for the President and her administration was required to attend. Requiring the Chief of Staff to attend would culturally obligate the service chiefs to also attend. Once the Chief of Staff's support was secured, the leadership could leverage his respected authority within the services and gain support from 2-stars and above. While there was

still some benign grumbling at the Division level, most followed the Chief of Staff's lead and worked to implement reforms.

This overwhelming task to tear down and rebuild the entire Philippines military system while simultaneously fighting insurgencies on several fronts was a great challenge that many within the ranks viewed as impossible. With combined U.S. and GRP funding, retired U.S. military (functional experts) with vast experience, were hired and embedded within various DND and AFP offices where the leadership wanted to have the greatest impact. Within this combined U.S. and Filipino team, the Philippines Defense Reform program was developed, dividing the tasks into 11 separate functional areas. In order to prevent the separate functional areas from becoming stove-piped, the leadership directed extensive coordination both inside the DND with whom U.S. contractors worked and met with frequently.

Each step of the reform program built on prior successes and provided a foundation for further positive change.³¹ Important to this approach was a comprehensive strategic communications campaign directed at all levels of the AFP to ensure that gains were attributed to the PDR program. It was important to long-term organizational change that service members at all levels believed that the PDR was a positive program that would benefit them even at the lowest levels. The goal was to create an irreversible trend toward reform that would extend well past the first phases when future administrations might be less ambitious or unsupportive. AFP and DND leaders knew that the politics and the culture would continue to resist change in the absence of effective pressure.

To solidify consensus for the program, DND began empowering subordinate leaders to continue the reform trends.³² Existing projects, actually already in the works prior to PDR program establishment, were given the PDR label. In one case a long-overdue military housing project removing enlisted soldiers and their families from living in tin shacks, was given the PDR label and attributed to the uniformed leadership.³³ Funds were more openly allocated to commanders to disperse and address issues directly facing the rank and file. Acting on recommendations from the U.S. subject matter experts, the Chief of Staff revitalized the position of Sergeant Major of the AFP and Senior Enlisted Advisors of the Services. With support from USPACOM and U.S. Army Pacific Command (USARPAC), the office of Sergeant Major was rapidly elevated on par with his U.S. counterparts. Unlike many regional countries, Filipino enlisted personnel speak English well and were therefore afforded ample opportunity to study at the USARPAC's NCO Academy and were enrolled in other enlisted military education courses in the U.S. Annually, mobile training teams using International Military Education Training (IMET) funding traveled to the Philippines thereby reaching greater numbers of enlisted personnel. For Southeast Asian militaries, this is unfortunately rare, but in this positive example, the role of NCOs and recognized value of enlisted personnel spread throughout the AFP and, in a few short years, their potential contributions were quickly realized and drawn upon. This became evident with Filipino senior commanders setting the example by introducing and placing their Sergeant's Major next to them at the head table during meetings. The commander's personal emphasis made this an easy cultural transition and one which the AFP readily adopted.

To initiate and gain momentum, the Filipinos established a system of “quick-wins.”³⁴ These easily accomplished projects were assigned milestones and suspense dates. By design, the quick-wins were mostly tactical in nature and many times conceived long before PDR was established but, nevertheless, each ammo or equipment delivery was labeled with the PDR bumper sticker. For example, establishing a unit level logistics credit card was insignificant in the grand scheme but recognized as real progress at the lowest levels. Practitioners at the tactical level began to see important improvements and emphasis on acquisition that had previously been neglected.

The Philippines Defense Reform is an amazing example of successful organizational change. In spite of initial skepticism, the program flourished and gained solid support throughout the ranks. Even initial skeptics admit that concrete cultural changes in NCO development and beneficial soldier welfare programs were realized and are now standard practice. There are valuable lessons from this experience to be exported throughout Southeast Asia and the greater international community. A positive example for the Philippines’ regional peers, larger organizations like the U.S. Department of Defense should also study the outcome and efficiencies in the era of challenged economies and decreasing budgets.

A Contentious Visiting Forces Agreement

The U.S. and the Philippines enjoy a robust habitual exercise program and extensive theater security cooperation activities. Each year, thousands of U.S. service members travel to the Philippines to engage in joint and combined training events. These events are critical to establishing interoperability and readiness in preparation for

various contingencies. Enhancing these training events are regular combined U.S.-Filipino military humanitarian assistance projects that provide critical medical and civic action services to the civilian population. These events are presented with a Philippines Government face at the forefront and go a long way toward legitimizing the military.³⁵ During the bases era, U.S. military personnel were legally protected under the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951 although it did not specifically address status of forces.³⁶ After the bases turn-over, and subsequent renewed combined training, the U.S. and the Philippines sought an agreement that would provide large numbers of visiting U.S. service members with SOFA-like protections while conforming to Philippines Constitutional law and sovereignty concerns. The outcome of those negotiations was the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) of 1999.³⁷

In recent years, the VFA has come under fire both from some in the Filipino government as well as from various societal factions that view the VFA as disproportionately benefitting the U.S. Several small, but vocal political groups have increasingly called for the VFA to be abrogated and their protests have garnered support from several prominent Senators while recent Philippine Presidents have resisted.³⁸ With current Filipino political attitude voicing strong opposition, any future violation by a U.S. service member will no doubt sound the final death knell for the VFA. This debate was thrust to the forefront in 2006 when a U.S. Marine was accused of raping a Filipino woman while on liberty in the Subic Bay area. In accordance with conditions of the VFA, the Marine was held in US custody while on trial and during the appeals process for nearly 3 years. Initially, the Marine was tried in a local municipal Manila court and, when found guilty, the judge ordered the Marine taken into Filipino

custody in spite of assurances from the highest levels of government that provisions of the VFA would be honored.³⁹ Several key U.S. civilian and military leaders demanded the Philippine government be held accountable.⁴⁰ As a demonstration of U.S. protest, USPACOM canceled the Field Training Exercise (FTX) portion of the premier annual U.S.-Philippines training event, Exercise Balikatan, citing concerns with deploying large numbers of US military personnel to a country where their rights were not guaranteed.⁴¹ In an astounding example of diplomacy and restraint, US Embassy Officials patiently maintained focus on the larger issue of interpreting provisions of the VFA. In a few short weeks, the Embassy and the Philippine government were able to secure release of the Marine into U.S. custody where he remained until the case was resolved in 2009.⁴² After 3 years of heated debate over the issue, the alleged rape victim recanted her testimony and the conviction was overturned. While many Filipinos privately questioned the alleged victim's integrity, her reversal was a national embarrassment and a serious blow to anti-American protest groups. This unfortunate event highlighted a significant deficiency in the relationship between the two allies and may well have rendered the VFA only viable until the next mishap occurs.

Conclusion

Solid adjustments are necessary for the future of the U.S.-Philippines alliance. The first critical step will be a proactive U.S. approach to solving disagreements over the VFA. The imminent renegotiation of the agreement will be difficult but the U.S. should seize the initiative and propose a review that seeks a more equitable arrangement. The current VFA is an international agreement that the U.S. cannot rely on, and a document that the Filipinos view as unfair and dismissive. From either

position, it is untenable and only viable as long as there is no requirement to invoke it. In the event of another Subic-like case, a breakdown in the relationship of bases era proportions is likely. While fear of potentially negative renegotiation outcomes is real, a proactive, patient and open-minded process providing equity to both parties is preferable to total collapse. If the VFA is abrogated, this will seriously curtail U.S. ability to monitor and assist with counterterrorism efforts, suspend a mature and valuable exercise program, and impede rapid response to a humanitarian crisis. By then it will be too late and exponentially complicated to solve.

OEF-P has been successful at marginalizing the terrorist threat but will soon reach the limits of its utility. With the exception of intelligence and ISR platform sharing, the AFP has emerged from the partnership with a greatly improved capability to counter the threat. The AFP continues to show positive results from eight years of operational planning assistance and they are now ready to conduct this part of the mission on their own. Periodic oversight and opportunity for reengagement can be accomplished with USPACOM's Theater Security Cooperation activities, specifically during Joint Combined Exercise Training (JCET) events.

The Philippine Defense Reform Program is an unquestioned success and U.S. subject matter experts initiated the momentum needed to envision and realize success. The PDR should be promoted throughout the region as a model for defense reform and USPACOM is the conduit.

Finally, serious discussion is necessary regarding access to the Philippines' vital ports, airfields and military facilities. Cold War notions must be discarded and alternatives identified. A prevalent, but mistaken mindset resides in some corners of the

U.S. DOD that access to the Philippines is a foregone conclusion. This false notion is challenged every week in the Filipino press. Protests in the Senate that the U.S. is violating Philippine sovereignty with JSOTF-P presence signals a warning that the U.S. can ill-afford to ignore due to changing international dynamics.

The United States never sought a Filipino colony, yet still feels responsible in many ways for the Philippines. This patronizing attitude occasionally manifests into a false notion that Filipinos can't or won't take responsibility for their own destiny. On the contrary, Filipino self-determination is genuine and enduring when achieved through assistance versus direction or coercion. As the World increasingly continues down the path to globalism, the U.S. and the Philippines will continue to share a unique relationship. Filipino and American populations have large representation in both countries and this guarantees an enduring interconnection. The relationship is, however, on a course for change. Recognizing and accepting this change sooner, rather than later, will allow both nations to shape a positive outcome.

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